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IN THE CLAIMS

Please cancel Claims 1-18 without prejudice, and add Claims 19 through 49 as follows:

19. (New) In a processing apparatus adapted to fetch plural instructions in parallel and dispatches one or more subsets thereof for subsequent pipelined processing by one or more respective execution units, a method comprising:

reading a branch instruction into an instruction processing pipeline stage;

determining a branch target address associated with said branch instruction;

evaluating whether the branch target address corresponds to a target in pipe condition

whereby the branch target instruction is already in the an instruction processing pipeline;

if the evaluation results in the negative, causing an instruction located at the branch target address to be fetched into a stage of the instruction pipeline from a cache memory using a regular fetch-from-cache sequence to service the branch; and

if the evaluation results in the affirmative, causing a shorted branch sequence to be executed to cause execution to branch to the branch target instruction.

20. (New) The method of Claim 19, wherein the branch target instruction is fetched into the dispatch stage of the instruction pipeline.

21. (New) The method of Claim 19, wherein the branch target instruction is fetched into the decode stage of the instruction pipeline.

22. (New) The method of Claim 19, wherein the branch target instruction is stored in the cache memory as a pre-decoded instruction and is fetched into a stage that follows the decode stage of the instruction pipeline.

23. (New) The method of Claim 19, wherein the cache memory is a branch cache.

24. (New) In a processor comprising an instruction pipeline having a plurality of pipeline stages and a cache memory that holds branch target instructions, a method of controlling said cache memory, comprising:

providing an indication when a branch instruction is detected in a selected one of said pipeline stages;

evaluating the branch target address of said branch instruction to thereby identify a branch target instruction;

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determining whether the branch target instruction has already been fetched into said computational pipeline;

determining a variable number of instructions that are already in the pipeline and are substantially between the branch instruction and the branch target instruction; and

causing the variable number of instructions already in the pipeline to be skipped over so that execution can continue at the branch target instruction.

25. (New) The method of Claim 24, wherein the branch target instruction is stored in the cache memory as a pre-decoded instruction, and is fetched into a stage that follows the decode stage of the instruction pipeline.

26. (New) The method of Claim 24, wherein the cache memory comprises a branch cache.

27. (New) A processing apparatus comprising:
an instruction pipeline comprising a plurality of stages, said stages comprising at least an instruction dispatch stage, a decode stage, and an execution stage;

a branch control unit that analyzes instructions in the instruction pipeline and determines whether at least one branch instruction is present, and if so, determines a branch target address therefor and determines whether the branch target address corresponds to the address of an instruction that is currently in a subsequent pipeline stage, and if so, causes a set of one or more instructions already in the pipeline to be skipped over so that execution can continue at the branch target instruction that is already in the instruction pipeline.

28. (New) The processing apparatus of Claim 27, further comprising a cache memory that stores instructions and, when the branch control unit determines a branch target instruction needs to be fetched into the pipeline, causes the cache memory to couple the branch target instruction into a stage of the instruction pipeline.

29. (New) The processing apparatus of Claim 28, wherein the branch target instruction is stored in the cache memory as a pre-decoded instruction and is fetched into a stage that follows the decode stage of the instruction pipeline.

30. (New) The processing apparatus of Claim 28, wherein the cache memory is a branch cache.

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31. (New) The processing apparatus of Claim 28, wherein the cache memory stores a precomputed branch target address and the branch control unit receives an early indication from said instruction pipeline prior to the execution of the branch instruction, wherein the branch control unit uses the precomputed branch target address to look up the branch target instruction before the branch instruction reaches the execution stage of the instruction pipeline.

32. (New) The processing apparatus of Claim 27, wherein the branch control unit receives an early indication from said instruction pipeline prior to the execution of said branch instruction.

33. (New) In a processing apparatus which fetches plural instructions in parallel and dispatches one or more subsets thereof for subsequent pipelined processing by one or more respective execution units, a method comprising:

- reading a branch instruction into an instruction processing pipeline stage;
- determining a branch target address associated with said branch instruction;
- determining that a branch target instruction is located in a cache memory, wherein the branch target instruction is an instruction whose address corresponds to the branch target address, and wherein the branch target instruction is stored in pre-decoded form in the cache memory;
- fetching the branch target instruction from the cache memory in pre-decoded form into a pipeline stage that follows a decode pipeline stage in the instruction pipeline, to thereby reduce the number of pipeline stall cycles that would occur if the branch target instruction were to be fetched into a first pipeline stage into which non-branch target instructions are normally fetched.

34. (New) The processing apparatus of Claim 33, wherein the cache memory is a branch cache.

35. (New) In a processing apparatus which fetches instructions into one or more instruction pipelines, a method comprising:

- reading a branch instruction into an instruction processing pipeline stage;
- evaluating a set of bits to determine whether the instruction is a branch instruction, and if so, to also determine which of a plurality of types of the branch instruction conforms;
- based on the evaluation, generating an early branch indication signal;
- in response to the early branch indication signal, accessing a precomputed branch target address;

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performing a branch prediction and later determining the prediction was incorrect; and
in response to the detection of the incorrectness of the branch prediction, using the using
the pre-computed branch target address to cause at least one branch target instruction to be
fetched from a cache memory.

36. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein the branch target instruction is fetched
into the dispatch stage of the instruction pipeline.

37. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein the branch target instruction is fetched
into the decode stage of the instruction pipeline.

38. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein the branch target instruction is stored in
the cache memory as a pre-decoded instruction and is fetched into a stage that follows the decode
stage of the instruction pipeline.

39. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein the cache memory is a branch cache.

40. (New) In a processing apparatus which fetches instructions into one or more
instruction pipelines, a method comprising:

reading a branch instruction into an instruction processing pipeline stage;

evaluating a set of bits to determine whether the instruction is a branch instruction, and if
so, to also determine which of a plurality of types of the branch instruction conforms;

based on the evaluation, generating an early branch indication signal before the branch
instruction reaches an execute stage of the instruction pipeline; and

in response to the early branch indication signal, and in response to an indication of the
type of branch instruction detected, determining whether a short branch into the pipeline or a
long branch out of the pipeline will be needed in the event of a mis-predicted branch.

41. (New) In a processing apparatus which fetches instructions into one or more
instruction pipelines, a method comprising:

reading a branch instruction into an instruction processing pipeline stage;

evaluating a set of bits to determine whether the instruction is a branch instruction, and if
so, to also predict a branch direction; and

in the event of a mis-prediction, reading a branch target instruction out of a cache
memory into a pipeline stage that is subsequent to the first pipeline stage to reduce number of
pipeline stalls that would otherwise be associated with the mis-prediction.

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42. (New) The method of Claim 41, wherein the branch target instruction is stored in the cache memory as a pre-decoded instruction and is fetched into a stage that follows the decode stage of the instruction pipeline.

43. (New) The method of Claim 41, wherein the cache memory comprises a branch cache.

44. (New) In a processing apparatus adapted to fetch instructions into one or more instruction pipelines, a method comprising:

reading a branch instruction into an instruction processing pipeline stage;
evaluating a set of bits to determine whether the instruction is a branch instruction, and if so, to also predict a branch direction; and

in the event of a mis-prediction, branching to a branch target instruction that is already in the pipeline ahead of the branch instruction to reduce number of pipeline stalls that would otherwise be associated with the mis-prediction.

45. (New) In a processing apparatus adapted to fetch instructions into one or more instruction pipelines, a method comprising:

reading a set of instructions to include a branch instruction and a set of previous instructions into an instruction processing pipeline stage;

evaluating a set of bits to determine whether the set of instructions includes a branch instruction, and if so, to also predict a branch direction;

based on the evaluation, determining that the branch target instruction has already been fetched into the instruction pipeline and in response thereto, skipping a subset of fetched instructions between the branch instruction and the branch target instruction so that the subset of fetched instructions do not consume pipeline resources, thereby reducing a delay associated with the branch relative to branches whose branch target instruction is not presently in a subsequent pipeline stage.

46. (New) In a single-chip processing apparatus adapted to fetch instructions into one or more instruction pipelines, a method comprising:

reading a set of instructions to include a branch instruction and a set of previous instructions into an instruction processing pipeline;

evaluating a set of bits to determine whether the instruction is a branch instruction, and if so, to also compute a branch target address for the branch instruction;

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storing the computed branch target address into a cache memory located in the single-chip processing apparatus, wherein the cache memory is configured to look up the computed branch target address in response to information related to the branch instruction;

in response to later detecting the branch instruction in the pipeline a second time, fetching the precomputed branch target address out of the cache during subsequent processing; and

causing the instruction stream to divert fetching to the branch target address using the precomputed branch target address.

47. (New) The method of Claim 46, wherein the information related to the branch instruction comprises the address of the branch instruction.

48. (New) The method of Claim 46, wherein the cache memory further stores the branch target instruction in the cache memory as a pre-decoded instruction and couples into the pre-decoded branch target instruction a stage that follows the decode stage of the instruction pipeline in response to a branch mis-prediction.

49. (New) The method of Claim 46, wherein the cache memory comprises a branch cache.